Self Directed IEP Research Highlights

When students become involved in the process of developing their own Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), they have the opportunity to practice many of the essential self-determination skills they need in school and in life. Unfortunately, students are often excluded from this process, and their presence at an IEP meeting does not necessarily mean that they are actively participating (Grigal,Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997).

The acquisition and performance of self-determination skills (e.g. self-management, choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting, and self-advocacy) are associated with improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. First, acquisition of self-determination skills may allow students to participate more fully and meaningfully in the career planning process (Snyder & Shapiro, 1997). Students should be taught skills such as setting realistic employment goals, evaluating progress toward self-selected goals, advocating for opportunities and supports, and accepting responsibility for one’s actions (Test et at., 2004).

Self-determination skills of students with LD can be increased through instructional methods (Zhang, 2001). Furthermore, these skills have the potential to augment students’ ability to self-regulate learning (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000), to increase goal-setting and self-assessment behaviors (Martin et al., 2003), to promote active participation in the transition planning process (Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995), and to increase employment and independent living outcomes (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997).

Every teacher’s goal for his or her students is success and happiness in life. Follow-up studies of students served in special education have found that too few have achieved this goal (Sitlington, 1993), but the one skill set that appears to be associated with successful life outcomes is self-advocacy and self-determination (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003).